DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 161 341   HE 010 567

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TITLE   A Conceptual Framework for Identifying and Assessing
                Needs in Postsecondary Education. AIR Forum Paper
                1978.
INSTITUTION   Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education,
                Boulder, Colo. National Center for Higher Education
                Management Systems.
PUB DATE   22 May 78
NOTE   23p.; Paper presented at the annual Association for
                Institutional Research Forum (18th, Houston, Texas,
                May 21-25, 1978) ; Best copy available; Figure 1 may
                be marginally legible

EDRS PRICE   MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   *College Planning; Decision Making; Educational
                Needs; Educational Objectives; *Information Needs;
                Information Utilization; *Institutional Research;
                Literature Reviews; *Models; Needs; *Needs
                Assessment; *Postsecondary Education; Problems;
                Resource Allocations
IDENTIFIERS   *Planning Methods

ABSTRACT
                In order to sort out a comprehensible total picture
regarding needs assessment and to develop a useful conceptual
framework for this area, a comprehensive review of the needs
assessment literature pertinent to the concerns of postsecondary
education was conducted. The review found that needs assessment is a
viable tool for input to planning, but serious problems exist. These
include: (1) lack of a good definition of need; (2) difficulty in
separating real need from wants and demands; (3) lack of valid and
reliable measures and indicators of met and unmet need; (4) lack of
useful taxonomies of needs; (5) tendency of many needs assessors to
be imprecise about whose needs are of concern, and to not consider
different groups separately; (6) tendency to focus on goals in needs
assessment rather than let needs data help the institution evaluate
and reformulate its goals; (7) tendency to be imprecise concerning
which decisionmakers will use the needs data, and how; (8) failure to
make use of relevant secondary data and to overcome the possible
pitfalls inherent in such data; (9) difficulty of integrating "soft"
with "hard" data; and (10) the tendency to make decisions using
over-simplified decision rules. This information provides a framework
to assist in overcoming such problems and for evaluating needs
assessment models. (Author/JMD)
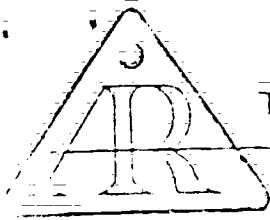
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A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

FOR IDENTIFYING AND ASSESSING NEEDS

IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Most college needs assessment efforts in the past have been subjective, unsystematic, and ad hoc. A significant body of knowledge is now available, however, that can help institutions to identify and evaluate constituent needs in a much more effective manner.

Needs assessment is a viable tool for input to planning, but serious problems exist. For example: (1) lack of a good defination of need; (2) it is difficult to separate "real need" from wants and demands; (3) lack of valid and reliable measures and indicators of met and unmet need; (4) the lack of useful taxonomies of needs; (5) the tendency of many needs assessors to be imprecise about whose needs are of concern, and to not consider different groups separately; (6) the tendency to focus on goals in needs assessment rather than let needs data help the institution evaluate and reformulate its goals; (7) the tendency to be imprecise concerning which decisionmakers will use the needs data, and how; (8) the failure to make use of relevant secondary data and to overcome the possible pitfalls inherent in such data; (9) the difficulty of integrating "soft" with "hard" data; and (10) the tendency to make decisions using over-simplified decision rules.

All current needs assessment models generate statements of need, and many of them rank order the identified needs. Yet hardly any of them develop diagnostic statements and inferences about need causes, which are necessary if one is to really understand the different needs and how to best meet them. This paper provides a preliminary conceptual framework designed to assist in overcoming such problems as those listed above, and for evaluating needs

All social programs in our society are in response to assumed or perceived needs, although observers wonder sometimes whether it is not the needs of the provider (for financial support, for nonpecuniary benefits such as status and prestige, for survival, for growth, etc.) rather than the needs of the receiver of the services that primarily stimulate social services into happening. The concept of need is clearly an integral part of our culture. Most of the great litarary classics are built around needs and how they are or are not met. Satisfying important human needs is the central theme of almost all commercial advertising, political lobbying and advocacy, and educational jargon.

Given that the concept of "need" is a primary driving force within education, including postsecondary education, the focus naturally turns to the analysis of which needs are most important, which are most feasible to meet, or which should receive priority attention in determining how available educational funds and other resources (such as staff, facilities, methodologies) should be expended. And during a period of projected enrollment decline and probable financial retrenchment, an objective analysis of needs becomes especially important for discerning which areas to maintain and which to cut back. Thus, the theme of the 1978 Forum of the Association for Institutional Research is "Balancing Needs and Resources." To insure such a balance, it is important to identify and assess effectively both the needs and the resources available. On the one end, however, there are serious difficulties related to identifying and assessing needs in postsecondary education - whether it be needs at the institutional, the state, or the national level.

It is only recently that postsecondary education people, other than those in the community colleges, have expressed much interest in conducting formal,

objective studies to identify and assess needs. Fortunately, however, a significant body of knowledge about what has been called "Needs Assessment" has been developed over the last decade by educators at the elementary and secondary levels, from which postsecondary educators can borrow. Furthermore, noteworthy developmental work is also now taking place in postsecondary education.

In spite of the developments that have taken place and the needs assessment models that have been developed, needs assessment is still a largely undeveloped area - for example, see the discussion by Witkin (1975). Many of the developmental efforts have been "piecemeal," and a conceptual framework that can tie all of the pieces together and guide practice has been missing. Therefore, from April through October of 1978, NCHEMS staff conducted a comprehensive review of the needs assessment literature pertinent to the concerns of postsecondary education. The purpose of this effort was to sort out a comprehensible total picture regarding needs assessment and to develop a useful conceptual framework for this area. Unexpectedly, several hundred relevant literary sources were identified. This paper is based on the review of that comprehensive literature search (Lenning, Cooper, and Passmore, forthcoming).

The demand for systematic, objective, and concrete needs assessment information will undoubtedly increase as rational planning models become more widely used within postsecondary education institutions and agencies. The ability to objectively assess needs and to effectively translate them into institutional and program responses will thus be expected to become increasingly more important in the years ahead. It is hoped that this preliminary formulation of a conceptual framework for needs assessment will lead to increasingly

The Concept of Need

A major problem in the area of needs assessment has been the lack of a good definition of need. Conceptions of need that are expressed in the various literature are not consistent, and often they are vague and nonspecific. Almost all needs assessment models have used a "discrepancy" definition, but as illustrated by Coffing and Hutchinson (1970), such a definition is too limited in its focus. Scriven (1977) cites the problem in colorful terms:

> Needs assessments have been for some time the most ludicrous spectacle in evaluation. The usual "models" are farcical and decisions based on them are built on soluable sand. One sign of the extent of the problem is the failure to begin with a tolerable definition of need....Is a need a discrepancy between the actual and the ideal (a formula I used to like)? No, because we often need to improve and know how to, without knowing what the ideal would be like. There is some attraction about adding the requirement that x must be feasible, since it seems odd to say that one could need something that wasn't possible. But that would eliminate the motivation for, e.g., medical break-throughs....[P. 25]

Different Aspects of the Concept of Need

Needs are viewed in different ways by those in the various disciplines. For example, in the fields of biology, physiology, and medicine needs are interpreted in terms of what will contribute to the efficient and effective functioning, and the survival and growth, of the human organism. Educators also tend to view needs in terms of individuals, but the focus here is more often on effective and efficient functioning, survival, and growth within the community or society. In psychology needs are largely interpreted in terms of the perceptions of individual Psychologists usually view need as a learned construct (taught or based on natural experience) used to indicate a perception of disequilibrium or unsatis-factory condition for which pressure/need exists to right the situation.

Some psychologists would broaden this to include groups of people, and they construe it as a force that pressures a person or a group to reduce or eliminate the discrepancy between what is perceived as desired and what perceptions or experiences indicate is currently the case. Sociologists, in turn, focus more on groups and society. They see needs as indicators of problems that must be solved, plus types and levels of competence and roles (and their integration) that must occur, for individuals, groups, and organizations to function effectively as social units, and within a social community or society at large.

All of the above are legitimate types of needs that must be included in any generic definition of needs for use in postsecondary education. The discrepancy definition of need guiding almost all formal needs assessment efforts and models up until now - the amount of discrepancy or gap that must be filled, through increased fulfillment or lowered threshholds of desirability, in order to bring the actual level of fulfillment (in terms of processes, procedures, conditions, outcomes, or results) up to the ideal level or condition - does not meet this condition. Neither does Coffing and Hutchinson's (1974) proposed alternative that need is a desired condition or state that may or may not be the current condition. Scriven (1977) was also bothered by the commonly accepted discrepancy concept of need, and proposed a formula as a definition:

> z needs x = z would (or does) significantly benefit from x and z is now (or would be, without x) in an unsatisfactory condition. (p. 25).

To illustrate this definition, let us suppose that z represents a college student, and x represents the particular knowledge and skills necessary to

~~...if we say that the student NEEDS the knowledge and skills~~

(a) the student would (or does) significantly benefit from the knowledge and skills;

(b) the student is now (or would be, without the knowledge and skills) in an unsatisfactory condition.

Scriven's definition adds important new clarifications, as he points out in his rationale:

> . . . at least it avoids the usual fallacies of a definition--
> explicit or implicit--of need in terms of wants or preferences
> (children may need a cavity filled but they certainly don't
> want it done; conversely, people may think they need laetrile
> or CAI with Braille keys but it doesn't follow that they do.)
> Do you need a million dollars? No. Would you significantly
> benefit from it? Yes. Hence we can't omit the second clause
> in the definition, which reminds us that needs are (typically)
> necessities not luxuries. (p. 25)

Scriven above makes the important point that wants or preferences are not the same thing as needs. Needs may be present that people do not recognize because of a lack of knowledge, because the need is being fulfilled and there is no discrepancy, or because it is being masked by other needs that demand attention. Similarly, a person may want something merely so someone else cannot have it, for the purpose of attracting attention, or because others have it. A want in such a case may be an expression of needs, but not the need expressed directly by the want (the expressed need is not the real need.) Therefore, most marketing research efforts and educational needs assessments are incorrect when they equate opinions, expressed desires, wants, or demands to needs. This is not to negate the usefulness of such information, which may provide good indications of needs that are present, and, especially if the wants are referred to by respondents in severe and critical terms (McGrath, 1970; Taylor, Vinebery, and Rufford, 1974.) But equating wants to needs causes people to not look for other types of infor-
mation that could confirm whether those wants are valid and reliable indicators

A New Definition of Need

All of the definitions mentioned in the preceding section are legiti-
mate concepts of need, and each defines a particular kind of need. Thus,
what is called for is a definition that is broad or generic enough to include
all of those specific types of need and show how they relate to one another.
Lenning, Cooper, and Passmore (forthcoming) have proposed a new definition
of need that they believe has some validity in this respect:

> A NEED is a necessary or desirable condition, state or
> situation--whether it be an end result that is actuality
> (met need) or a discrepancy that should be closed between
> a current or projected actuality and a necessary or highly
> desirable end result (unmet need)--as judged by a rele-
> vant person or group using multiple objective criteria
> that have been agreed upon.

This definition is a combination of discrepancy and level of necessity, where
the amount of need varies directly with level of necessity and inversely with
amount of discrepancy. Therefore, both of the following statements of need
are valid according to this definition: "our students' needs for job infor-
mation and employer contacts are well taken care of by the placement office
on this campus," but "they have a serious need for more counseling prior to
their interviews with prospective employers." This definition is also congruent
with Burton and Merrill's (1977) observation that solutions in cases of unful-
filled (unmet) needs can involve both increased fulfillment and lowered
threshholds of desirability or satisfaction.

This definition is pertinent to all of the different types of need
outlined in the following section. It is also pertinent whether one is
referring to needs: of prospective or enrolled students, of the college or
program, of faculty or staff, of the local community or of the region, of the
state or nation, or of society at large or other entities and groups. It also

needs.

According to this definition, it is proper to use self report of wants as an indicator of need, but the self report must have been gathered in an objective, unbiased manner, and there must also be other supporting evidence. Multiple sources of evidence, or multiple criteria as this is called in the definition, will normally lead to increased assurance of actual need (increased reliability and validity) if objectivity is of paramount concern when gathering each type of evidence.

This definition still has a potential problem in that it does not specify when the necessity or desirability becomes significant enough to be classified a need, or when the discrepancy between fulfillment and unfulfillment becomes significant enough to warrant that the need is partially unmet. This is in fact necessary, however, if it is to be generic in nature and apply to all of the types of need that have been identified by different people. On the other hand, the definition does indicate that this is properly determined by the judgement of a relevant person or group (who is a relevant person or group depends on the situation) using multiple, objective, agreed upon criteria (who must reach agreement is not specified, but once again it varies with the situation).

Types of Outcomes for Whom

If one is going to attempt to identify and assess needs, it is important to be very clear about whose needs are of concern. The tendency of needs assessors has been to not be specific enough about whose needs are being identified and analyzed, and to not separately consider the needs of specific subgroups. Similarly, needs assessors too often do not deliniate ahead of time which specific types of needs are of concern to them.

Whose Needs Are of Concern?

As mentioned earlier, the focus of a needs assessment study can be on needs within the institution (for example, courses, programs, departments, enrolled students, faculty, or administrators) or outside of the institutio (for example, prospective students, groups or organizations within the loca community or the state, or society at large). It is important to delineate at the earliest stages of the study exactly whose needs are of concern (whe "whose" could even include entities like organizations and the ecological environment).

A comprehensive, two-level classification of groups and entities for which someone in postsecondary education might want to assess needs was developed as a part of the NCHEMS Outcomes Structure (Lenning et al, 1977). It is presented in Figure 1. The focus there was on "audiences," the perso groups, or other entities that could potentially receive or be affected by postsecondary education outcomes. Various needs assessments have been cond for many of these groups and communities.

The listing of Figure 1 does not provide the detailed third-level cate needed for many outcomes studies at the institutional and program levels. The reason additional levels of detail are not included is that any further subdivisions could be based on several equally valid factors, and one user of the Structure would want one breakdown, while another person with a diff philosophy, problem, and context would want a second breakdown. For exampl students within a program could be usefully subdivided into: (1) those majoring in the program versus those only taking courses in the program, (2) age groupings, (3) commuter students versus resident students, (4) unde classmen versus upperclassmen, (5) groupings according to disadvantaged status, (6) men and women, (7) groupings according to life and career goals

Figure 1

CATEGORIES OF PERSONS, GROUPS, AND OTHER ENTITIES
OF POSSIBLE CONCERN IN ASSESSMENTS OF NEEDS[a]

10. *Individual/Group Clients*—This category refers to persons or groups of persons who are direct clie s of the postsecondary education unit of concern and/or their immediate associates, such as family and relatives or peers

   11. *Students*—Individuals or groups of individuals who currently are enrolled in the program, institution, or system of postsecondary education.

   12. *Former Students*—Individuals or groups of individuals who formerly were enrolled in the program, institution, or system of postsecondary education.

   13. *Family and Relatives of Students or Former Students*

   14. *Peers and Associates of Students or Former Students*

   15. *Faculty*

   16. *Staff Other than Faculty*

   17. *Other Individual/Group Clients*—An example would be an individual who is none of the above but is served by an advisory service offered by the college.

20. *Interest-Based Communities*—This category refers to large groups that are identified as entities working toward a *well-defined interest or mission*.

   21. *Private Enterprise Communities*—Communities where a major purpose is financial remuneration and profit—for example, corporations, small businesses, and farmers.

   22. *Association Communities*—Communities where members belong on the basis of affiliation rather than employment, such as unions and professional societies.

   23. *Government Communities*—Communities designed to administer government regulations and services, such as city hall, state department of education, and legislative communities.

   24. *Nongovernmental/Public Service Communities Other than the Institution Producing the Outcome*—Nonprofit service organizations, such as schools, hospitals, welfare agencies, philantnropic foundations, colleges (other than the college producing the outcome), and research organizations.

   25. *Institution or Institutional Unit Producing the Outcome*—The postsecondary education institution and/or units within that institution that are perceived as the producer/facilitator of the outcome(s) of concern.

   26. *Other Interest-Based Communities*—An example would be an ad hoc coalition task force of representatives from two or more of the above areas.

30. *Geographic-Based Communities*—This category refers to large groups defined on the basis of *functional territorial boundaries*.

   31. *Local Community*—A township, city, county, metropolitan area, or other type of locality having particular boundaries. It is not necessarily restricted to the legal or jurisdictional boundary, but the functional one in which the impact of the institution is (or should be) directly and physically felt. The boundaries will vary with the institution/program and outcome of concern.

   32. *The State*

   33. *A Region*—An aggregation of states or parts of states.

   34. *The Nation*

   35. *An International Community*

   36. *Other Geographic-Based Communities*—An example would be a research discovery that affects primarily people living in the coldest latitudes, or where it snows heavily.

40. *Aggregates of People*—This category refers to subpopulations of people *distinguished by particular characteristics that may indicate common concerns, needs, or wants*, but who do not necessarily have a common interest or mission, and therefore do not constitute communities.

   41. *Ability Level Subpopulations*—Subpopulations defined according to level of ability/proficiency on general intellectual functioning or specific skills—for example, gifted, typical, disadvantaged, or skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled.

   42. *Age Subpopulations*

   43. *Educational Level Subpopulations*

   44. *Income Level Subpopulations*

   45. *Occupation Subpopulations*

   46. *Physical Disability Condition Subpopulations*

   47. *Race Subpopulations*

   48. *Sex Subpopulations*

   49. *Other Such Aggregates*

Most needs assessments at the elementary and secondary education level have focused on the needs for particular educational outcomes. Needs for outcomes are important in postsecondary education also, and there are many types of potentially important outcomes on which one could focus. Lenning (1977b) has reviewed the literature for categorizations of outcomes and related concepts such as goals, and found almost 90 of them, some focusing on outcomes for individuals, some on outcomes for society, and some for both. Based on that review and other work, a comprehensive taxonomy of types of postsecondary education outcomes was developed (Lenning et al, 1977, pp. 55-66), which can be used in planning and developing items for a needs assessment survey questionnaire.

Needs for particular outcomes imply needs for process activities. For example, student outcomes needs may suggest a need for special methodologies, environments, faculty-student ratios, teaching strategies, instructors, innovative techniques, etc. Such process needs can also usefully be focused on directly, not merely inferred from assessed needs for particular outcomes. In addition, there are needs in postsecondary education that are less directly related to outcomes, and which elementary and secondary educators tend not to be concerned, such as needs for financial aid, needs for information about institutions and programs, and needs for lodging facilities.

When assessing needs, the focus can be broad or general and diffused ("wide-band study") or it can be concentrated or specific and detailed ("narrow-band study"). The wide-band study will be concerned with broad categories of needs while the narrow-band study will be concerned with specialized and detailed need categorizations. Lenning, Cooper, and Passmore (forthcoming) have identified a number of different need type classifications, some of

[1950] community need categories, and Bradshaw's Taxonomy of Social Need
[1972]) while others have a narrow-band focus (e.g., Murray's [1978] categories
of manifest and latent needs, Kinniek's [1975] Taxonomy of Information Needs
of Prospective Students, and the Mooney Probelem Checklist scales [Pagels,
1973]).

Many of the categorizations of needs that have been developed place
needs into categories along a continuum on a particular dimension. Examples
of such dimensions are: developmental tasks corresponding to chronological age,
basic versus learned (or derived) needs, personal versus social problems
resulting in needs, maintenance versus incremental needs, conscious versus
unconscious needs, general versus specific needs, current versus projected
needs, critical versus routine needs, instructional versus noninstructional
needs, economic versus noneconomic needs, needs for goods or products versus
needs for services, easy-to-measure needs versus difficult-to-measure needs,
and short-term or short-duration needs versus long-term or long-duration needs.
Thinking in terms of such dimensions can be helpful for determining and setting
the appropriate and desired boundaries of focus in planning for an assessment
of needs. Thinking in such terms can also help one in setting needs assessment
focus priorities within those boundaries.

Assessing Needs

As has been discussed, one must specifically determine whose needs, and
what types of needs for each group, are to be assessed before plans are begun
for conducting a needs assessment study. Now some important conceptual consid-
erations relating to the conduct of the assessment itself will be discussed, brie

Models for Assessing Needs

A number of needs assessment models have been developed for use in the

general in their focus. Thus, some of the concepts and procedures they discuss may be useful also at the postsecondary level, for example: Coffing and Hutchinson (1974), English and Kaufman (1975), Hoepfner et al (1972), Klein et al (1971) Lewis (1973), New Jersey State Department of Education (1974), Read (1974), and the various other models reviewed by Adams (1976), Kaufman (1971), and Witkin (1975, 1976). Conversely, postsecondary education models have tended to be more diverse and specific in their focus: vocational, occupational, and continuing education needs (Adams, 1976; Brown, 1974; Keim and others, 1975; Putnam, 1970; Smith, 1968; Tucker, 1973); environmental needs (Aulepp and Delworth, 1976); course-level needs (Burton and Merril, 1977); community service needs (Central Florida Community College Consortium, 1973; Gollattscheck et al, 1976; League of California Cities, 1975; Selgas, 1977); needs of the handicapped student (Coffing Hodson, and Hutchinson, 1974); community information and service needs (Gotsick, 1974); overall curricular needs (Gray, 1974; Hamilton, 1973; Pagels, 1973); administrative functioning needs (Higher Education Management Institute, 1977); prospective students' needs for institutional and program information (Kinnick and Lenning, 1976; Lenning and Cooper, 1978); state-level needs for career education (McCaslin and Lave, 1976); needs related to performance problems (Mager and Pipe, 1970); institutional goal needs (Peterson, 1976); curricular needs in programs fc emergency ambulance personnel (Shook, 1969); and student financial aid needs (the models developed by ACT and CSS). Diverse and specialized models such as many of those above demonstrate the importance of tailoring concepts and procedur to the uniqueness of the conditions and situation. For example, an assessment of the curricular needs in a program for emergency ambulance personnel has to be quite different than one to assess curricular needs in a fine arts program, even though they are both focusing on curricualar needs and are both using a critical incident technique.

Several writers have attempted to classify needs assessment models into typ€

and characteristics. One way to classify needs assessment approaches is according to the purposes for which they are designed. For example, we can classify approaches according to those focusing on planning versus those focusing on policy formulation, those focusing on curriculum development versus institutional goal setting, and those aimed at understanding problems versus those aimed merely at identifying problems. Lenning, Cooper, and Passmore (forthcoming) identified 30 different general purposes served by needs assessment as discussed in the literature. (In differentiating model types, the League of California Cities (1975) grouped according to three broad, overall purposes: social policy, exploratory, and program needs assessments.) Furthermore, these purposes can vary according to the types of needs being assessed, whose needs are being assessed, who is doing the assessing and for whom, etc. Another way to classify needs assessment approaches is according to time of need being assessed, such as focusing on current needs versus focusing on projected needs (or both) or short-duration needs versus long-duration needs. Some additional model classification dimensions that could be useful are according to: population types being assessed, such as Baumheier and Heller's (1974) five population/purpose types - secondary data analysis, general population surveys, service population surveys, service provider surveys, and political and community surveys; breadth and detail of focus, such as the "narrow band" and "wide band" types of studies mentioned earlier; concreteness of the data collected, such as Anderson and Associates (1976) reference to "objective" and "subjective" needs assessments; approaches used for collecting data and conducting analyses, such as Kaplan's (1976) four strategy types and Scrivens (1977) categorization of common study types; and how the data are interpreted, such as Kaufman's (1972) inductive, deductive, and classical model differentiations.

Planning and Operational Considerations

Collecting valid and reliable evidence of need(s) is a necessary and crucial part of every needs assessment study. For any met and unmet need, a number of

indicators of the presence of the need than will others, and such factors as whose needs are being assessed can affect the validity of the indicator or measure. Therefore, multiple indicators and measures should be used whenever feasible. This gives increased assurance of validity (that it is a real need), if they all indicate the same thing about need, plus it facilitates tailoring the data collection system to different groups. When one measure is less valid, another measure may be more valid, and vice versa.

Currently, most need surveys are administered solely to the client groups whose needs are being assessed. It is important not to ignore client self-reports about their perceived needs, but other data are needed as well. Implications about need can also be derived from client reports about such things as school environment, their peers, disappointments or dissatisfactions, successes and achievements, activities, problems, and complaints. Baird (1976), for example, discusses the importance of identifying and remedying "brass tacks." Surveys should be administered to relevant others for their observations and judgments, also. They perhaps can be more objective, and may have more experience and expertise in making such judgments. Profiles showing how different groups view the situation can be quite revealing, and the pattern of similarities and discrepancies may significantly facilitate understanding about the needs.

When outcome needs are of concern, performance measures and history (trends) become very important, but self- and other-report data are still desirable also. Other useful supplemental data include frequency counts from institutional records concerning such things as attendance, complaints, amount of use (and ratings) of services, requests submitted for assistance of various kinds, etc. Similarly, statistics from governmental and other community agencies can provide useful supplemental evidence for studies of community needs. What others have found in similar types of institutions, programs, or locales can also be useful supplemental evidence if care is taken to examine closely how the other situations

have termed "secondary data"), although they save costs and time in addition to providing useful supplemental evidence, they can lead to trouble if great care is not taken in their use. Boyd and Westfall (1972) provide criteria for use in when particular secondary data are okay for a particular situation and use, and they also discuss precautions that can help one avoid the potential pitfalls.

Concerning data collection methods, needs assessors generally limit themselves to several traditional instruments: questionnaires, paper and pencil tests, and interviews. However, other instruments that may be just as reliable and valid for a particular case should be considered as alternatives and supplements for the traditional instruments. Lenning (1978) found fifty different methods in the literature that were recommended for assessments of various kinds, including needs assessments. Yet most needs assessors never even consider such nontraditional methods that have been shown to be practical, valid, reliable, and cost efficient for particular purposes and contexts. As with indicators and measures, and for the same reasons, the use of multiple data collection methods is desirable - and the large variety of data collection methods available can facilitate this.

Interpretation and use of needs data are also crucial elements in a needs assessment study, and too often the application of needs assessment results is ineffective. If needs data are going to have practical impact, the users of the needs assessment results must be precisely identified early in the assessment planning process, prior to conducting the study. Input should be solicited from them concerning their specific concerns and what needs information will be helpful to them in their decision making. Once analyses are completed, brief, concise reports tailored to each persons information needs should be sent to them. Additional ways to increas the impact of the results are also available (Lenning, Cooper, and Passmore, forthcoming).

Some needs assessment approaches only try to identify needs. Yet, more is needed: (2) a ranking of needs according to how critical they are, and (3) information that can help one to understand why the need occurred. In addition to

assessment models, even though they may rank the needs, make use of over-simple and ineffective decision rules that do not consider enough factors or consider each factor in isolation from the others. Another problem with many of the models is that they key so much on current goals and objectives that the results of such assessments are not useful for evaluating current institutional and program goals, for modifying or reformulating them, or for developing new goals to meet changing conditions. Lenning, Cooper, and Passmore (forthcoming) explore these problems in detail and discuss some possible solutions. They also provide in-depth and extended discussion about all of the other topics covered in this paper. Needs assessment clearly is a viable tool to assist administrators and faculty members who are concerned about meeting client and community needs. However, much more development in this area needs to take place before it can began to reach its full potential.

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